

PUBLIC COMPLAINTS

5529

(No. 6 January 1999)

BACKGROUND

5529.1

(No. 6 January 1999)

The State Board of Forestry's 208 Report asked the department to review the adequacy of its procedures for responding to public complaints regarding forest practice matters. In addition, the report asked the department to take steps to make its procedures for responding to public complaints better known.

NOTE:

A "public complaint" is an oral or written expression of dissatisfaction or concern with the administration of the forest practice program by the department. Public complaints include those received during the review of THPs. A request for information about a timber operation is not a complaint. The "public" includes registered professional foresters, timber operators, and governmental agencies.

In response to the board's request, the Director found the following:

- The lack of formal procedures for responding to public complaints could permit complaints to be overlooked.
- The lack of formal procedures makes it difficult for members of the public to know what happens to their complaints.

COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

5529.2

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The following procedure will be followed in responding to public complaints:

- A complaint log will be established at the Sacramento office, at each region office, and at each field office that administers the forest practice program.
- The complaint log will contain the following:
 1. Date complaint was received.
 2. Name and address of person or group making complaint.
 3. Brief description of the complaint.
 4. Staff person to whom complaint was referred.

5. Date of first response.
 6. Date(s) of any follow-up response(s).
 7. File designation of response(s) to facilitate relocation of material, including reference to a timber harvesting plan file, if appropriate.
- Within two working days, a preliminary response will be made giving any preliminary information available to the party registering the complaint. A preliminary response could be an acknowledgment of the complaint and statement that a further response (within 30 days) will be made after the complaint has been examined. If a complaint is to be referred to a staff person who will not be able to respond within two working days, the following should occur:
 1. The person (secretary, forester, etc.) in the department who the complainant contacted initially will make a preliminary response.
 2. The preliminary response should acknowledge receipt of the complaint and indicate that the staff person involved will contact the complainant.
 3. The preliminary response can be by telephone or in writing. If the complaint can be answered completely by telephone at that time, the log will so note.
 - A final follow-up response, if needed, will be provided within 30 days of receipt of a complaint. The final response should identify the person or office to which the complainant may turn if dissatisfied with the response.
 - If the complaint is referred to the regional office or the Director's office, the log will so state and the complainant will be so informed. The regional office and the Director's office will begin their own logs of the complaint.
 - The first written response to any complaint will include an outline of the procedure for department response to any complaint. The Complaint Procedure (not available) indicates the information that will be provided.
 - A summary report of complaints and their disposition will be supplied to the Director by the regions for inclusion in the annual forest practice report.
 - The Complaint Procedure (not available) is a handout outlining the procedure and information that will be sent initially to individuals on the Board of Forestry's mailing list, to RPFs, and to licensed timber operators. The regional staffs to explain the department's response procedures to complaints may use the handout.

- Copies of any letters of complaint and responses will be sent to plan submitters if a plan can be identified.
- The complaint log is not a confidential record. Therefore, under some conditions, it may be necessary to so inform a complainant.

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